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ABSTRACT

Showing ten-minute movie clips can be an effective way to motivate students to read literature and to teach elements of fiction, namely plot, character, setting, symbol, irony, and theme. A clip from "And Then There Were None" may be used to teach various elements of plot, including conflict and the four types of conflict (man vs. man, man vs. self, man vs. society, and man vs. nature). A film clip from the horror movie "Nosferatu, The Vampire" shows how setting can refer to aspects other than where the story takes place, while a clip from "The Great Santini" provides an opportunity for analysis. Other film clips are also effective, such as "Rumblefish" to teach symbols, "Billy Budd" to explore irony, and "To Kill a Mocking Bird" to discuss theme. Students learn to apply literary elements to works they read other than those studied in class. (An interpretation of the fair use section [section 107] of the U.S. Copyright Law [Pub.L. 94-553], and a list of ten movies exemplifying each literary principle are appended.) (EL)

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MOVIES AND LITERARY ELEMENTS

I go to movies to watch previews. During those two or three minute segments, distributors usually convince me that I must see their film. These distributors knowingly manipulate the brief scenes to thrill and cajole me into spending more time and money at the theater. After being thrilled by a preview, I wonder what I can do to get my students to sense the same anticipation for a thrilling novel. Of course, the movie is shorter and demands less of an audience than a longer, a well-written novel, but there must be enticement for students to read. Then, one night at the movies, I suddenly realized during the previews, that I could use preview techniques for my literature class. I could show movie clips[1] based on novels[2] to introduce a book and to teach literary elements such as plot, character, setting, symbol, irony, and theme. Movie clips have added significantly to my literature class.

Previously, when teaching literary elements, I would write brief definitions on the board and demonstrate the definition through the assigned short story. It was as boring as it sounds. The students would memorize the definitions and not recognize the correlation between the definition and other writings. I wanted them to do more; I wanted them to become actively involved in the discussion of literary aspects. I needed to focus their attention. Since audiences are drawn to the screen with captured attention, I decided to pull my examples from the screen.

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This paper demonstrates how I use movie clips to teach elements of fiction, namely plot, character, setting, symbol, irony, and theme. I briefly describe each clip and provide study questions and discussions. Finally, I include a listing of ten movies exemplifying literary principles I address. The students remember the clips and remember the principles; what more could I ask?

PLOT

To teach plot, I show a clip from And Then There Were None (Twentieth Century, 1945) based on Agatha Christie's novel by the same name. The clip begins with the maid and butler in the kitchen complaining about their absent employer, Mr. Owens, who invites eight guests to his island home. The scene continues as the butler serves the dinner to the guests who question Mr. Owens' interest in the nursery rhyme "Ten Little Indians." The guests recount the rhyme noting the deaths of each little Indian. As the last Indian in the song dies, the butler places a recording of Mr. Owens welcoming his guests and individually accusing the butler, the maid, and each guest of killing someone in his or her past. The scene ends with the recorded Mr. Owens' voice asking, "Prisoners of the Bar of Justice, have you anything to say in your defense?"

The students briefly relate the events of the film clip, retelling what has taken place. I ask students to list methods of killing the ten little Indians, ranging from choking, poisoning, and drowning to bleeding, scorching, and

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hanging. The students list the ten characters and his or her murders. The students write what they believe will be the outcome of the movie and how each character meets his or her death. As the students conjecture, they soon recognize they are writing plot, and it's amazing all the new variations of the same plot.

With that brief clip, we discuss another element of plot--conflict. After listing the four main types of conflict (man vs. man, man vs. self, man vs. society, and man vs. nature), the students easily recognize each conflict manifested in the scene. For example, the characters individually suspect each other as one slowly eliminates the other guests (man vs. man). Each character faces his or her own secret crime (man vs. self). Each is a fugitive of society's rules and justice (man vs. society). And finally, each is stranded on an island without means for escape (man vs. nature).

Students now identify plot and conflict from the scene, and with this practical exercise, they demonstrate plot and conflicts from their own readings.

SETTING

Next, we study setting. Many students naively think that setting refers only to where the story takes place. They don't understand the full significance of setting. A film clip from a horror movie is excellent since setting becomes paramount in frightening people. For my clip, I use the German production of Nosferatu, The Vampyre (Grusk

Films, 1981) based on Bram Stoker's Dracula. Since students are familiar with the legend of Dracula, they find this clip exciting. The clip begins with Count Dracula's solicitor walking alone through a Translyvanian forest at night to meet the Count for the first time. The Count (played by Klaus Kinski) meets the solicitor at the door, invites him in, and serves refreshments while weakly mumbling that the servants are gone and the two of them are alone. There are several closeups of the bloodless, deathly Count while wolves howl in the dark and the clocks strike midnight as Dracula breathlessly whispers that the children of the night make their noises. The solicitor accidently cuts his thumb while slicing bread, and the weak Count forcefully sucks at the blood from the retreating, frightened man.

I suggest time is a part of setting. The students identify time elements essential to this clip. For example, they identify the clock time is midnight, the calendar time is in the mid-nineteenth century, the seasonal time is fall or winter, and the historical time is superstitious and ignorant.

We also discuss location as setting. They know the geographical location is Transylvania, the cultural environment is one of noble birth, servitude, and ignorance, while the physical environment is an ancient, isolated, deteriorating family mansion.

All aspects of setting add to the suspense in this clip. Frequently we overlook setting or dismiss it as being

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insignificant to a story, but in some situations, as in Nosferatu, the setting itself becomes a conflict and even a character.

CHARACTER

Students seem to understand character better than any other literary element. Perhaps they identify with characters as people or perhaps characters are more concrete than other abstract terms we discuss. I use a clip from The Great Santini (Orion Pictures, 1980) based on Pat Conroy's novel. The scene includes the day the Meachum military family moves to their new home. Beau Meachum (played by Robert Duvall) is the Great Santini who has just been reassigned stateside from oversea duty. This scene begins at 3:00 am when he wakes his "troops" for the move. The clip provides various insights into Beau Meachum's character. As they drive in the pre-dawn, the family sings songs. His wife and children sing "Dixie" while he sings "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" because he says "'Dixie' is a loser's song." He later wakes his son Ben to talk. Ben asks his father if he has been afraid and announces he will not join the corp when he's old enough. Beau admits being afraid at times, but his fright has made him better, and he unequivocally demands that his son will serve in the corp. The family finally arrives at their destination, surprised at the beautiful Southern home Beau has found for them. Then Beau Meachum lines his "troops" and in strict military fashion orders his children to stop their

"bellyaching" as he recounts with drill sergeant precision and firmness that his children are to be better, harder, and tougher than other kids. He orders Ben to dismiss the "troops."

The students begin to analyze the complex character of Beau Meachum, The Great Santini. The students list physical characteristics and biographical information the clip provides. They recall what he has said, what he has done, and what he believes. They list his family's statements about him or their actions towards him. From this listing, students see that superficially Beau Meachum is demanding, unrelenting, intolerant, and authoritative, an unpleasant personality, but they see the character's complexities as they realize his insecurities as well as his sensitive, loving, fatherly attitude towards his family. Character analysis demands more than saying the character is good or bad, and The Great Santini shows this.

SYMBOL

Unlike characterization, my students generally have a difficult time with symbols, probably because symbols are often abstract and obscure. To discuss the importance of symbols in literature, students need to realize they have the ability to recognize symbols. The movie of S.E. Hinton's Rumblefish (Universal, 1983) is superb for teaching symbol. Francis Ford Coppola makes symbol identification easy. The black and white movie dramatically shows the Siamese fighting fish (the symbol) in color. The film clip

begins at a pet store where the young, gang leader Rusty James (Matt Dillon) has found his older brother Motorcycle Boy (Mickey Rourke) looking at the Siamese fighting fish he calls "rumblefish." Motorcycle Boy tells Rusty James how the fish need to be separated because they fight each other to the death, and if a mirror were placed before a single fish, the fish would fight his own reflection to death. Motorcycle Boy also defends the fish's need to be free in the river rather than isolated and confined to a tank. At the end of the scene, the police officer who is trying to end the gang fights, walks into the store looking for the two.

The students describe the characteristics of the Siamese fighting fish, explain how the environment affects the fish, and how the fish experience both internal and external conflicts. The students then define the street term "rumble" and explain the significance of the word "rumblefish." The students easily see how the fish represent both Motorcycle Boy and Rusty James, how their environment affects them, and how they experience both internal and external conflicts. As a class we discuss how repetition, emphasis, and association establish the symbol of the Siamese fighting fish.

IRONY

Students also have a hard time with irony when I simply ask them to provide an example from their reading. They need a visual example. I use Billy Budd (Allied Artists,

1962) based on Herman Melville's novel to teach irony. I use the clip where Squeak attempts to get Billy to slander Claggart, but Billy refuses. Billy observes a sailor sneaking up to kill Claggart. Billy prevents the sailor only to have Claggart find them, and to dismisses the two men when he realizes there is nothing to report. The next morning, Claggart falsely reports to Captain Vere that Billy is trying to excite a mutiny. Captain Vere calls for Billy and has the two men confront each other. Billy is so stunned by the false accusations that he can't speak (partially due to a stuttering problem), and in his frustration, Billy reaches out to Claggart, forcing Claggart to fall, hit his head, and die.

We then discuss three types of irony: dramatic irony, situation irony, and verbal irony. Dramatic irony is easy for the students now they know that they, as an audience, are aware of what's going on, but the character doesn't. They know Claggart is plotting against Billy trying to set him up as a mutineer, and students are aware of what's going on while Captain Vere is not aware. For situation irony, the students understand that just because Billy tries to prevent trouble on board, he is suspected of mutiny and because of the accident and Claggart's death, Billy is guilty of mutiny. Finally, the students understand verbal irony when Claggart lies and tells Vere that Billy can't speak because he can't find the words to prove his

innocence, and not because of Billy's speech disorder and shock.

THEME

The final element of fiction I teach through movie clips is theme. As a student I found theme discovery difficult, subjective, and frustrating. But by focusing my class' attention to a single clip lasting several minutes, we as a group find theme more easily. I use the superb movie version of Harper Lee's To Kill a Mocking Bird (Universal, 1962) starring Gregory Peck. The scene begins with the prosecuting attorney questioning Tom Robinson, a black accused of raping the young, white Mayella Ewell. When Tom is asked why he helped Mayella with some work, he honestly, but socially unacceptably, answers that he felt sorry for her. The court is shocked when they hear a black man say he feels sorry for a white woman. The scene concludes with Atticus Finch's powerful closing speech to the jury about its duty to provide justice in a prejudiced society.

As a class, we discuss theme by first describing the attitudes and values of the society in the film clip. Their prejudice is evident. We discuss the values and attitudes of Atticus Finch. The students admire his heroic efforts to fight against such prejudice, and they carefully listen to his closing remarks talking about the American judical system and about man's responsibility to man. They discuss values, attitudes, and prejudices evident in the short

scene, and then arrive at a general theme about the movie and book from only a clip. But the method for finding theme is easier.

There are so many fine movies made from good books that there are plenty to choose from. I know my students would like to spend the entire time watching movies, but as a teacher, I don't want to spend class time watching movies. I want my students to read, to like what they read, and to understand what they read. I also want them to get excited about literature. Movies are a simple means to introduce students to literature. Movies don't take the place of a book. Therefore, I'm very careful about using only a clip (my clips never last more than ten minutes) because I want the students to remain curious enough to read the book. The other good thing about short clips is that it doesn't take away from class discussion of the readings. For every clip I have shown, at least one student wants to read the book (I only show film clips of books we are not reading as a class), a testimonial for the film's motivation for reading. The students apply literary elements not only to the few clips I show but also to their readings. Movie clips successfully entice my students to read literature.

NOTES

[1] After consulting with different copyright consultants and attorneys, I have learned the following interpretation of the fair use section (Section 107) of the U.S. Copyright Law (Pub.L. 94-553). For use that does not require permission of the copyright owner or its agent, four conditions must be satisfied. First, the use must be for non-profit educational purposes; (2) the nature of the copyrighted work must be examined; (3) the use must be of a portion of the work; and (4) one must examine the use and its effect upon the potential market for or value of the work. Therefore, exerpting a portion of a copyrighted work for instructional purposes is governed by the Fair Use section of the copyright law. Basically, the reproduction of 10% or less of a copyrighted work probably constitutes Fair Use. If clips, for example, are ten minutes long and the program's total length is thirty minutes, then the clip exceeds general Fair Use guidelines. Secondly, off-air taping for educational use is currently governed solely by the off-air taping guidelines established by Representative Kastenmeir's committee of Congress. One of the requirements is that the program taped must be taped in its entirety. It is not permissible to edit or merge programs. However, in playback mode, you may playback those portions you desire. Another condition of these guidelines is that the program may only be used instructionally with students for ten

consecutive instructional days and then may not be used for instructional purposes after that time. However, the tape could have been retained for forty-five calendar days from taping, and then must be erased. And finally, combining excerpts from various sources is generally regarded as being beyond fair use when the result is an anthology, or "new" work. As usual, consult with your school attorney if there are questions.

[2]An excellent source for movies based on literature is A.G.S. Enser's Filmed Books and Plays: A List of Books and Plays From Which Films Have Been Made, 1928-83 (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1985).

PLOT

And Then There Were None. By Agatha Christie. With Louis Hayward and Barry Fitzgerald. Twentieth Century Fox, 1945.

Death Trap. By Agatha Christie. Sidney Lumet, dir. With Michael Caine and Christopher Reeve. Warner Brothers, 1982.

Excalibur. The Once and Future King by T.H. White. John Boorman, dir. With Nicol Williamson and Nigel Terry. Columbia Pictures, 1981.

Ivanhoe. By Sir Walter Scott. Richard Thorpe, dir. With Robert Taylor and Elizabeth Taylor. MGM, 1952.

Lord of the Flies, The. By William Golding. British Lion Films, 1963.

Lord of the Rings, The. By J.R.R. Tolkien. United Artists, 1980.

Murder on the Orient Express. By Agatha Christie. Sidney Lumet, dir. With Albert Finney and Jacqueline Bisset. Thorn EMI Films, 1974.

Oliver Twist. By Charles Dickens. William J. Cowan, dir. With Dickie Moore. Monogram, 1933.

Shining, The. By Stephen King. With Jack Nicholson and Shelley Duvall. Columbia Pictures, 1982.

Tom Sawyer. By Mark Twain. United Artists, 1973.

SETTING

Count of Monte Cristo, The. By Edgar Allan Poe. Rowland V. Lee, dir. With Robert Donat. United Artists, 1934.

Exodus. By Leon Uris. Otto Preminger, dir. With Paul Newman and Marie Saint. United Artists, 1960.

Grapes of Wrath, The. By John Steinbeck. John Ford, dir. With Henry Fonda and Jane Darwell. Twentieth Century, 1940.

Ivanhoe. By Sir Walter Scott. Richard Thorpe, dir. With Robert Taylor and Elizabeth Taylor. MGM, 1952.

Lord Jim. By Joseph Conrad. Richard Brooks, dir. With Peter O'Toole and James Mason. Columbia, 1965.

Lord of the Rings, The. J.R.R. Tolkien. United Artists, 1980.

Nosferatu the Vampyre. Dracula by Bram Stoker. With Klau Kinski. Grusk Films, 1981.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. By Ken Kesey. Milos Forman, dir. With Jack Nicholson and Louise Fletcher. United Artist, 1975.

To Kill a Mockingbird. By Harper Lee. Robert Mulligan, dir. With Gregory Peck. Universal, 1962.

CHARACTER

A Man for All Seasons. By Robert Bolt. Fred Zinneman, dir. With Paul Scolfield and Orson Wells. Columbia, 1966.

Chosen, The. By Chaim Potok. With Rod Steiger and Robby Benson. CBS-Fox, 1981.

Diary of Anne Frank, The. George Stevens, Jr., dir. With Millie Perkins. Twentieth Century Fox, 1959.

Exodus. By Leon Uris. Otto Preminger, dir. With Paul Newman and Marie Saint. United Artists, 1960.

French Lieutenant's Woman, The. By John Fowles. Karel Reisz, dir. With Meryl Streep and Jeremy Irons. United Artists, 1981.

Great Santini, The. By Pat Conroy. With Robert Duvall and Blythe Danner. Orion Pictures, 1980.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. By Ken Kesey. Milos Forman, dir. With Jack Nicholson and Louise Fletcher. United Artists, 1975.

Sophie's Choice. By William Styron. With Meryl Streep and Kevin Kline. ITC Films, 1982.

Tess. By Thomas Hardy. Roman Polanski, dir. With Nastassia Kinski and Peter Firth. Columbia, 1980.

World According to Garp, The. By John Irving. With Glenn Close and Robin Williams. Columbia, 1982.

SYMBOL

All Quiet on the Western Front. By Erich Maria Remarque. Lewis Milestone, dir. With Lew Ayres. Universal, 1930.

Animal Farm. By George Orwell. John Halas and Joy Batchelor, dirs. Associated British and Pathe Film, 1955.

Billy Budd. By Herman Melville. Peter Ustinov, dir. With Peter Ustinov and Terence Stamp. Allied Artists, 1962.

East of Eden. By John Steinbeck. Elia Kazan, dir. With James Dean and Julie Harris. Warner Brothers, 1955.

Grapes of Wrath, The. By John Steinbeck. John Ford, dir. With Henry Fonda and Jane Darwell. Twentieth Century, 1940.

Great Gatsby, The. By F. Scott Fitzgerald. Jack Clayton, dir. With Robert Redford and Mia Farrow. Paramount, 1973.

Moby Dick. By Herman Melville. John Houston, dir. With Gregory Peck and Richard Basehart. Warner Brothers, 1956.

Rumblefish. By S.E. Hinton. Francis Ford Coppola, dir. With Matt Dillon and Mickey Rourke. Universal, 1983.

Separate Peace, A. John Knowles. With John Heyl and Parker Stevenson. Paramount, 1973.

To Kill a Mockingbird. By Harper Lee. Robert Mulligan, dir. With Gregory Peck. Universal, 1962.

IRONY

A Man for All Seasons. By Robert Bolt. Fred Zinneman, dir. With Paul Scolfield and Orson Wells. Columbia, 1966.

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Great Gatsby, The. By F. Scott Fitzgerald. Jack Clayton, dir. With Robert Redford and Mia Farrow. Paramount, 1973.

Lord Jim. By Joseph Conrad. Richard Brooks, dir. With Peter O'Toole and James Mason. Columbia, 1965.

Ordinary People. By Judith Guest. Robert Redford, dir. With Mary Tyler Moore and Donald Sutherland. Paramount, 1980.

Pride and Prejudice. By Jane Austen. MGM, 1940.

Scarlet Letter, The. By Nathaniel Hawthorne. With Colleen Moore. London Films, 1934.

THEME

All Quiet on the Western Front. By Erich Maria Remarque. Lewis Milestone, dir. With Lew Ayres. Universal, 1930.

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To Kill a Mockingbird. By Harper Lee. Robert Mulligan, dir. With Gregory Peck. Universal, 1962.